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Saudi Food and Drug Authority to Inspect Imported Foods

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Report Highlights:

Starting May 25, 2009, the Saudi Food and Drug Authority will take over the responsible of inspecting imported high value food products at the Kingdom's ports of entry. The Authority will be responsible for setting food standards and ensuring the safety of food products.

General Information:

Saudi Food and Drug Authority to Inspect Imported Foods Beginning May 2009

Starting May 25, 2009, the Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA), established in March 2003, will be responsible for inspecting imported high value food products at the Kingdom's 27 ports of entry. The Authority will take charge of setting food standards and ensuring the safety of food products. In the past, standards were set by the Saudi Arabian Standards Organization (SASO) while imported foodstuffs were tested by the Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI) at ports of entry. The SFDA will take over inspection of imported animal feed, fruits, vegetables and drugs in the next few months.

The authority has hired a German company to help implement its three-year \$200 million dollar capacity

building program, which involves upgrading food inspection laboratories, training staff, and developing advanced food inspection techniques.

The SFDA, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, has a Board of Directors consisting of eight ministers: Municipality & Rural Affairs, Defense, Interior, Health, Commerce and Industry, Agriculture, Water & Electricity, Finance, Economic & Planning plus the SFDA Executive Director General, and representation from other organizations such as the Saudi Arabian Standards Organization (SASO), the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and Saudi food and drugs experts.

Regulatory Role of the SFDA

The SFDA will regulate, oversee, and control food, drugs, and medical devices, as well as setting mandatory standards for both imported and locally manufactured products. Testing activities for these products will be conducted in SFDA or other government-operated laboratories. In addition, the SFDA will be responsible for educating consumers on all matters related to food, drugs and medical devices.

Principal work objectives of the SFDA are summarized below:

- Monitor the safety, security, and effectiveness of food and drugs for human and animal consumption.
- Monitor the safety of complementary biological and chemical substances, cosmetics and pesticides.
- Monitor the safety of medical diagnostic devices and their impact on public health.
- Establish and implement clear policies and procedures for food and drugs.
- Conduct research and applied studies to identify health problems, their causes, and set methods for research evaluation. The Authority will establish scientific guidelines for specialized consulting services and executive programs in the fields of food and drugs. This may be accomplished through the recruitment of experts or through a partnership with research bodies such as King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) and/or university research centers.
- Control and supervise the licensing of factories producing food, drugs and medical devices.
- Disseminate and exchange information with local and international scientific and legal agencies.

The SFDA will initiate its regulatory tasks in two phases. The first phase began on March 2003 and will be completed in the next few months. During the first phase, the SFDA will devote its efforts to establishing its organizational structure and resources to prepare itself for the second phase when it will take charge of regulating food, drugs, and medical devices, as well as setting mandatory standards for both imported and locally manufactured products. SFDA will execute the following tasks during the first phase:

- Work with concerned ministries and agencies to revise, develop and update regulatory laws to meet human/animal health safety and product quality requirements.
- Ratify food and drug policies in the Kingdom and set mechanisms to ensure the quality and safety of food and drugs.
- Establish specified systems to help concerned agencies accomplish administrative and field follow-up to ensure easy and safe application of laws and regulatory orders.

- **Adopt methods and techniques that will enable food and drug regulatory agencies to verify the accuracy and validity of information contained on the labels of circulated foodstuffs and drugs.**
- **In coordination with the Ministry of Health and the Saudi Arabian Standards Organization (SASO), establish specifications and standards for production, distribution, importation and registration of drugs and medical devices.**
- **Together with SASO, set and certify texts of National Standard Specifications related to scaling, calibration, code identification of products and goods, including food & drug sampling methods.**
- **Prepare specifications, procedures and methods of detecting food and drug products.**
- **In collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, establish hygiene specifications and requirements that food industry facilities and workers should follow.**
- **Develop general policies that ensure the availability of appropriate drugs in the Kingdom.**
- **In collaboration with the Ministry of Municipality and Rural Affairs, establish hygiene requirements for all outlets linked with public health.**
- **In cooperation with the Ministries of Health, Finance (Customs Department) and Commerce and Industry, establish standards and methods that will regulate customs clearance procedures for imported drugs.**
- **Propose and issue rules for the application of penalties that will be imposed on violators of Saudi Arabia's food and drug laws.**
- **Coordinate with the Ministry of Municipality and Rural Affairs to develop rules, procedures and requirements for the control and inspection of Saudi Arabia's animal slaughtering facilities and related sales outlets.**

In the second phase, which starts at the end of May 2009, the Authority will assume responsibility for the following procedural, regulatory and calibration tasks:

- **Inspect all agricultural, animal product and veterinary medicine imports customs clearance.**
- **Control imported food and drugs.**
- **Control animal and other agricultural products under agriculture and animal quarantine statutes.**
- **Control locally processed food items before and during the production process, under the terms of quality and compliance certificates.**
- **Test children's food, therapeutic potable water, tobacco and plant derivatives.**
- **Control and inspect markets, foodstuff commercial centers, restaurants, and food plants to ensure adherence to Saudi health and safety specifications, and laws related to commercial fraud in the areas of food and drugs.**
- **Ensure the safety of potable water supplies.**
- **Supervise the implementation of statutes and laws related to food and drugs.**

- **Monitor hygiene conditions for facilities producing food and drug products.**
- **Supervise the safety of food workers through periodic site examinations.**
- **Regulate, monitor and inspect animal slaughtering facilities and meat sales outlets.**